



THE HATEFUL SIX

Suicide Squad director David Ayer explains why sometimes it's good to be bad.

Words Adam Colby

Everyone loves a bad guy, whether it be cultured killers like Hans Gruber or Hannibal Lecter, or iconic villains like Darth Vader and Magneto. Director David Ayer has taken things one stage further with *Suicide Squad*, turning comic book supervillains into (albeit reluctant) heroes, and to him that was one of the main drawcards of DC Comics' latest blockbuster.

"Bad guys do cool stuff and play by a different set of rules," Ayer explains. "I think bad guys are always the coolest characters in movies because good guys



are so predictable. You know in any given situation what the good guy is going to do so it's hard to get ahead of the audience. But the bad guy is always going to be a wild card. Plus, the good guys are already loved and embraced by the world. The bad guys have a little bit of baggage they've got to work through [laughs]."

The *Suicide Squad* first appeared in print in 1958 but it was John Estrander's 1987 reboot that provides the template for their first big screen adventure. In *Suicide Squad*, a six-strong unit of dangerous criminals – assassins

Deadshot (Will Smith) and Slipknot (Adam Beach), psycho shrink Harley Quinn (Margot Robbie), pyrokinetic gangster El Diablo (Jay Hernandez), genetic mutation Killer Croc (Adewale Akinnuoye-Agbaje) and thief Captain Boomerang (Jai Courtney) – are recruited into a shadowy government task force to be used as disposable assets for high risk military missions. Viola Davis and Joel Kinnaman plays their commanders Amanda Waller and Colonel Flag, respectively, while their foes include the Enchantress (Cara Delevingne) and the Joker (Jared Leto).

So how did Ayer set about recruiting his version of the Dirty Dozen?

"The great thing about this cast is that they're all perfectly tuned to each of their roles and have incredible chemistry together," he explains. "These aren't easy characters to portray, but as a director, I like to cast actors who already have the characters within them. That is incredibly important to me, and the cast really came together beautifully."

"Margot was one of the first to be cast, and it was just hand-in-glove. She did an incredible job, and really became that character. Cara Delevingne was also one of the earliest people I cast. I had this vision of a beautiful Enchantress with an angelic face who is really up to no good, and Cara is just perfect for the role because she is those things!"



Q UINN & A

Margot Robbie had never heard of Harley Quinn before she signed on to appear in *Suicide Squad*. But she quickly became the movie's pin-up girl, and gives a wild performance worthy of her character's cult status.



What was your reaction when David Ayer first approached you about the project and what was the draw for you? Were you familiar with the comic books?

No, I didn't read comics growing up or know anything about this world. I've just always been a massive fan of David's work. When *End of Watch* came out, I saw it four times in the cinema, and *Fury* is obviously amazing. I think the way he tells stories is so engaging, so when I heard he'd be writing and directing *Suicide Squad*, I wanted to be part of it. I knew it would be an epic experience – and it was. So, knowing nothing about Harley Quinn and without any other actors being cast, something in my gut told me, 'Yeah, this is the one. Do it.'

What qualities do you think David brings to this film?

I don't know of any other filmmaker who gives direction the way that David does. He's extremely character-driven, so working with him was amazing. He goes into the character's whole history, far beyond the side you see in a film. He also taps into your own personal history and finds a way to utilise that on set, which makes every moment matter so much more and elevates the performance in a way.

Why do you think Harley Quinn has become so iconic to fans, and what about her most resonated with you?

Harley is incredibly well liked by fans, and I didn't really understand why before I started reading the comics. Then, of course, about three comics in, I was just as obsessed with her as everyone else is. But I was curious what it was about her that so many people were responding to, and it turns out that what people like is how flawed she is. That was how I saw it, anyway.

How much training did you do for the physical demands of the role?

The physicality was a massive component of playing this character, so I trained for six months prior to shooting. David wanted the stunts to be integrated into the scenes and was all in favour of the actors doing what we could, which was awesome for me because I really didn't want to hand Harley over to someone else for half the film. And the stunt team on this film was incredible, and almost all Australian, so the best part was that I got to do heaps of training on the Gold Coast, which is where I'm from.

What do you think it is about these anti-heroes that we connect to so deeply, particularly the *Suicide Squad*?

I think it has to do with the fact that they're *not* perfect. They have so many flaws and personal issues but, weirdly enough, I think that's what makes them so relatable. They don't make the most ethical decisions all the time and are obviously not so relatable then and shouldn't be seen as role models in that respect. But I think that with any character you see in a film – not just comic book characters – it's the flaws that resonate. So it's important not to smooth them over, even when they need to be heroes.

"Will is Deadshot, on and off the screen. He has such a fantastic history as an actor and has been in so many amazing projects. The cast really looked up to him that way. And on set, he has this wonderful energy. He was definitely the more level-headed, rational one of the group."

"Adam Beach just leaps off the screen as Slipknot. And as Boomerang, Jai Courtney delivers a performance that is unlike anything you've seen from him before. I gave Jai license to really be bad, and I think, for the whole cast, it was just a fantastic opportunity to step outside of the boundaries of what is considered normal."

– and Jared really is the ideal guy to do it. To watch this new Joker come to life was just spectacular for me as a filmmaker. It's incredibly faithful to canon – you just see a second of him on screen and you know who it is, yet this is a Joker we haven't seen. I mean, it takes such courage to do that, and I'm really proud of how well Jared pulled it off."

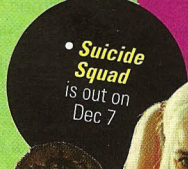
Ayer is best known for action movies like *Fury* and *Training Day*, and he brought a similar gritty style to *Suicide Squad*; while there's a lot of CG in the movie, he says most of the stunts were actually performed by the stunt team and the actors themselves.

“BAD GUYS DO COOL STUFF AND PLAY BY A DIFFERENT SET OF RULES”

Outside the comic book world, the characters in *Suicide Squad* were largely unknown – with one exception: The Joker, who has been portrayed on screen a number of times before, most memorably by Heath Ledger in his Oscar-winning turn in *The Dark Knight*.

Ayer acknowledges he approached the casting with some trepidation. "This is a character that is the best known bad guy – the best known villain – in fiction, hands down, which is incredible. The Joker has been around since 1941 or so and is truly a cultural icon. You're stepping into huge shoes – and I think you can only do that with reverence and trepidation

However, for him, the most rewarding part of the movie was the interplay between the characters.

"This is a really big movie, and it was a huge physical challenge. But, for me, it's always going to be the actors and the character work. There's this bar scene in the movie that, to me, is just a jewel. It's the last scene you would expect to see in a film like this – the characters sitting around talking and bonding – but the performances are just so truthful and real. Those were really the best days for me as a director." 

• *Suicide Squad* is out on Dec 7

